

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, UK, EI

SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO BELFAST - POLITICAL TALKS

1. SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER CALLAGHAN MADE A LIGHTENING VISIT TO BELFAST DECEMBER 21. HE PRESUMABLY INTENDED TO DEMONSTRATE THE CONTINUING BRITISH COMMITMENT TO NORTHERN IRELAND, ENCOURAGE THOSE ENGAGED IN THE SECURITY EFFORT AGAINST TERRORISM, AND AFFIRM THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE CURRENT TALKS WITH NI POLITICAL LEADERS ON AN INTERIM DEVOLUTION OF POWER. END SUMMARY.

2. THE PM'S VISIT LASTED FIVE HOURS. NEWS OF THE PM'S ARRIVAL HAD BEEN HELD TIGHTLY, AND SECURITY WAS TIGHT HERE. THE PM FLEW TO THE LOCAL AIRPORT AND WAS TAKEN TO DOWNTOWN BELFAST BY HELICOPTER. HE VISITED A HEAVILY PROTECTED POLICE-ARMY BASE AND THEN THE PRINCIPAL ARMY QUARTERS WITHIN THE DOWNTOWN SECURITY BARRIER, AND WALKED A FEW MINUTES ON A SECURE SHOPPING STREET. HE LUNCHEDED AT GOVERNMENT HEADQUARTERS WITH NURSES, FIREMEN, BUS DRIVERS AND AMBULANCE MEN, AND FLEW OUT AGAIN BY HELICOPTER. A TERRORIST ATTACK ON AN ADVERTISING COMPANY DURING HIS VISIT, AND ON HOTELS AFTERWARDS APPEARED COINCIDENTAL.

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3. AFTER THE LUNCH, THE PM MADE HIS SALIENT POLITICAL POINT TO THE PRESS: DIRECT RULE WORKS BUT IS NOT SUFFICIENT. "I WOULD LIKE TO SEE NI TAKING OVER MORE RESPONSIBILITIES FOR ITS OWN AFFAIRS, AND THAT CANNOT BE DONE ON THE BASIS THAT EXISTED PRIOR TO 1968, WHEN I BECAME INVOLVED IN IT. IT'S GOT TO BE DONE ON A NEW BASIS, AND THAT MEANS THAT ALL THE POLITICAL GROUPS HERE.....HAVE GOT TO JOIN IN THE DISCUSSIONS,

HAVE THEM AND SEE IF THEY CAN WORK OUT A COMMON SOLUTION."

4. COMMENT: THE VISIT OBVIOUSLY WAS INTENDED TO HONOR AND ENCOURAGE OFFICIAL AND PRIVATE PEOPLE OF GOOD WILL IN NI. IN ADDITION, MANY PEOPLE HERE HAVE BEEN SKEPTICAL ABOUT THE SERIOUSNESS OF SECRETARY OF STATE MASON'S INTENTIONS IN TALKS WITH POLITICAL LEADERS ON INTERIM DEVOLUTION. THE PM APPARENTLY AIMED TO SHOW HMG'S COMMITMENT TO THAT ENDEAVUR.

5. BUT THE PM'S COMMENTS MAY HAVE OTHER EFFECTS. THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOR PARTY HAD BEEN NOTABLY RETICENT ABOUT THE POLITICAL TALKS. BEFORE THE LAST ROUND, LEADER GERRY FITT WAS QUOTED AS STATING IN EFFECT THAT HE WAS GOING TO TALK ONLY ABOUT HAVING TALKS. CALLAGHAN SAW FITT IN LONDON FOR AN HOUR DECEMBER 20 AND APPARENTLY REASSURED HIM. FITT WAS QUOTED AS SAYING AFTERWARD THAT THE PM HAD COMMITTED HIMSELF NOT TO ALLOW A RETURN TO UNIONIST DOMINATION IN NI. MOREOVER, THE PM REPORTEDLY ALSO SPOKE STRONGLY IN FAVOR OF THREE SEATS FOR NI IN THE EUROPEAN ASSEMBLY, AND ELECTION BY PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION. THE SDLP HOPES THAT PR WOULD GIVE THEM THAT THIRD SEAT.

6. IN NORTHERN IRELAND, MOWEVER, WHAT PLEASES THE SDLP MAY WELL DISPLEASE THE UNIONISTS. THUS, THE FORMER WILL LIKE WHAT THE PM SAID IN BELFAST ABOUT NO RETURN TO 1968, BUT THE LATTER MAY TAKE IT AS A DIRECT SLAT AT THEIR GOVERNMENT OF

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NI UNTIL THAT DATE. AND AS REGARDS THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS, THE UNIONISTS HAVE PROPOSED A LEGISLATIVE AMENDMENT DIRECTLY CONTRARY TO SDLP INTERESTS: ONLY TWO SEATS TO NI, AND A VOTING SYSTEM THAT SHOULD ENSURE UNIONIST CONTROL OF BOTH.

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Decaption Note:
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Disposition Case Number: n/a
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